

**Statement of  
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**Before the Subcommittees on  
Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans;  
Forests and Forest Health;  
and National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands  
of the  
House Committee on Resources  
March 14, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record on H. R. 3558, *Species Protection and Conservation of the Environment Act*. In particular, the Nature Conservancy is grateful to the Committee for introducing H.R. 3558 which is helping to bring needed attention to the serious harm caused by invasive species to our biological heritage and economic resources.

The Nature Conservancy is dedicated to preserving the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. The Conservancy has approximately 1 million individual members and over 1,900 corporate donors. We currently have programs in all 50 states and in 28 nations. To date our organization has protected more than 90 million acres in the 50 states and abroad, and has helped local partner organizations preserve million acres in other nations. The Conservancy itself owns more than 1,390 preserves – the largest private system of nature sanctuaries in the world. Our conservation work is grounded on sound science, strong partnerships with other landowners, and tangible results at local places.

**Why is The Nature Conservancy concerned about invasive species?**

- An internal survey of the Conservancy found that approximately 75% of the operating units believe invasive species are a killer threat preventing the accomplishment of our conservation strategies.
- Up to 46% of the plant and animal species listed as endangered in the United States have been negatively impacted by invasive species – In this regard, invasive species are a threat second only to habitat loss.
- The economic costs to the people of the United States alone are estimated at \$137 billion annually. Damages by invasive plants has led to annual losses in agricultural productivity of \$20 billion. Globally the costs are much higher.
- Taking action on invasive species provides powerful common ground with our partners – public and

private, national and international.

### **Comments on H.R. 3558**

There is no question that invasive species – both aquatic and terrestrial – pose a huge problem to the natural resources of the United States. In addition, Federal and state agencies and private landowners face a management challenge with inadequate resources – personnel, management options, and funding. Any program that provides mechanisms to work across land ownership to solve the challenge of invasive species management is a positive step forward. H.R. 3558 contributes to the further implementation of the National Invasive Species Management Plan, and enhances the capacity of private, State and Federal entities to manage invasive species. We commend the members of the Committee for raising the awareness regarding the significant impacts of invasive species of all taxa to our environment, and ultimately to our economy.

- 1. Providing resources to areas of greatest need.** The prevention, eradication, control and restoration of invasive species are, to a significant extent, a matter of local management. We believe it is important to provide mechanisms that stimulate local stakeholders to take action and the resources to see the action to a successful conclusion. H.R. 3558 makes an important effort to stimulate local action through its provisions addressing assessment, planning, monitoring and subsequent action on private, state and Federal lands. The legislation greatly expands the public/private model of invasives action presented by the “Pulling Together Initiative”. This model for action has been used successfully by the Conservancy and many others throughout the country.
- 2. Prevention and rapid response.** The emphasis in the bill on prevention and rapid response highlights very constructively those management activities that most effectively minimize the establishment of invasive species. Natural resource managers need sufficient resources to eradicate incipient populations of invasive species wherever possible. The need for enhanced rapid response capability associated with non-agricultural lands is clear. This capacity must be matched, however, by sufficient resources to implement an early detection system that is the triggering mechanism for the response.
- 3. Capacity building for Fish and Wildlife Service.** As with many of the Federal agencies, there is a growing gap between the need to manage invasive species and the resources available for even the highest priority management activities. The backlog in invasive species management on the National Wildlife Refuge System is a serious threat to fish and wildlife habitat. The implementation of demonstration projects in the refuge system could contribute to reducing this backlog and help test new management tools.

### **Areas of concern:**

- 1. State management plans.** There is the potential for confusion between the goals and target groups of the grant programs within this bill and the “Partners for Fish and Wildlife” program managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Similarly, state management plans are called for through the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force under the authority of the National Invasive Species Act (NISA) which is scheduled for re-authorization in 2002. Through the Forest Service implementation of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act, States also are called upon to develop plans to address forest insects and

disease, including non-native invasive species like gypsy moth. The National Invasive Species Council should be required to develop guidance which leads to comprehensive and consistent state plans for invasive species management

2. **Scope of lands covered by grants.** Language relevant to the Aldo Leopold Native Heritage Program suggests that projects on State and private lands are currently limited to those adjacent to Federal lands. However, invasives know no boundaries and federal funds should be directed to where the greatest resource needs are located. We recommend language that allows the use of federal funds on either federal, state, or private lands, or some combination of these lands, depending on where the greatest resource need is in a particular area.
3. **Costs of monitoring.** It has become standard practice to include statements that call for monitoring of projects and program implementation. However, insufficient resources and accountability for monitoring are all too often provided for this purpose. We recommend increasing the funding level authorized to a level commensurate with the need for monitoring.
4. **Federal versus local focus.** Success in the fight against invasives requires to a great extent cooperation among federal, state and private stakeholders. It is important to stimulate as much activity in organizing local stakeholders to fight invasives as possible. We would like more of the focus of decision making regarding funding of projects to involve local stakeholders, and less of the decision making to be made at the headquarters level.
5. **Implementation through the National Invasive Species Council.** The Council is a potentially powerful mechanism to harmonize, standardize and integrate the actions of all federal agencies who deal with invasive species. Authorizing the Council to implement activities within H.R. 3558 will significantly contribute to coordination among agencies and Departments.

### **Future Opportunities**

The Nature Conservancy would like to take this opportunity to identify several areas not covered by H.R. 3558 which we believe must be addressed in the future to more effectively use Federal and State processes and programs:

1. **Authorize the National Invasive Species Council.** The Council was established through an Executive Order in 1999 and has been given the broad responsibility for implementing the Executive Order and the components of the National Invasive Species Management Plan. We believe the full potential of the Council – administratively and legislatively – will not be achieved until it is codified and provided more permanent status.
2. **Encourage the development and support for a cross-cut budget to implement the National Invasive Species Management Plan.** Until a cross-cut budget is deployed, federal and state efforts to address invasive species will continue to be fragmented and inconsistent and ultimately will not lead to the performance outcomes we should expect from federal funding. Congress can boost the development of such a budget through appropriations language and other communications with the Administration.
3. **Bolster Rapid Response.** Rapid response, by definition, means the rapid deployment of people and

resources to eradicate a plant or animal population prior to establishment. On Federal lands, rapid response is hampered by procedural requirements associated with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). While TNC fully supports the use of NEPA as an important tool in achieving conservation goals, we also believe that new and creative solutions in the application of NEPA requirements is essential. NEPA streamlining is one area of opportunity being explored through the National Fire Plan and more recently by NISC staff, and we support expanding these efforts to include rapid response to invasive species.

4. **Establishment of a permanent fund.** We also encourage the establishment of a permanent fund to fight invasive species. The annual appropriations process, coupled with the inability of Federal agencies to maintain funds for invasive species management across fiscal years, is a serious limitation to Federal and non-Federal rapid response capabilities. While APHIS has the broadest authority currently to address invasive species, this authority has generally been used only for agricultural systems. The GAO identified other barriers to a comprehensive Federal rapid response effort in a June 2001 report entitled "Obstacles Hinder Federal Rapid Response to Growing Threat"; we believe their recommendations have merit.

In summary, The Nature Conservancy believes HR 3558 is consistent with the needs identified in the National Invasive Species Management Plan and provides for important support to States and to private landowners to increase their capability in prioritizing and managing invasive species. We look forward to working with the Committee to make further improvements to H.R. 3558 and other legislation on invasive species.